

THE
NATURE and IMPORTANCE
of
TRUE REPUBLICANISM

WITH A FEW SUGGESTIONS FAVORABLE TO
INDEPENDENCE

A
DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT RUTLAND (VERMONT)

THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1801--

IT BEING THE 25th ANNIVERSARY OF
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

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A DISCOURSE, etc.

Luke, XXII, 26.

"But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."

The occasion of these words was a dispute among the disciples of Christ about superiority, as may be seen by attending to ver. 24th; "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." They had imbibed a strange notion that the Savior was about to emancipate the Jews from the Roman yoke, and to restore their civil rights. Elated with the delusive prospect, they began to contend for posts of honor, and who should have the pre-eminence in the new establishment. The insatiable thirst in mankind for preference has appeared in every age, and been a fruitful source of many evils. Our blessed Lord, to manifest his detestation against such haughty ambition, points his disciples to the gentile world, ver. 25th, "And he said unto them, The Kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors." Plainly suggesting, that for them to seek for posts of honor under the specious garb of sanctity, was symbolizing with the heathen, and acting perfectly inconsistent with the nature of that kingdom, he came to introduce; the lineaments of which are concisely drawn in my text: "But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you let him be as the younger, and he that is chief as he that doth serve."---

In which words we have the nature, and design of a free government, epitomised, by the unerring hand of wisdom. Liberty and equality are words very familiar at the present day, and may possibly be abused. That there ought to be a kind of subordination among men, none will dispute; and that it is beneficial to society, is equally obvious. A veneration for parents, deference to the aged, and respect to officers both in church and state, are matters taught us in the word of God. The idea is implied in my text; a proud ambitious aspiring temper was what Christ went to discard. To be greatest was the design of the disciples, without a generous regard to the community at large; to get into office was the great object: blind to the interest of the commonwealth, the importance of the matter did not come up to view; but in a heedless manner they would thrust themselves forward, only to be called great. If from such selfish motives men crowd themselves into office, a similar administration may well be expected. It is of singular importance to ascertain the true criterion of greatness. When a man distinguishes himself by a proper regard for the general good, he is then worthy the name; he rises to eminence, and commands a kind of veneration from all around him.--This is the true dignity the blessed Jesus taught among men and that shone conspicuous in his life. *He that is greatest among you let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.* Plainly suggesting, that it is the design of the appointment to office, to serve the public, and is the only test of true greatness.

The nature and design of a republican government;--Its peculiar Importance;-- Together with a few observations favorable to independence, will very briefly be attended to on the present occasion.

1. Some of the features of a free government will be drawn. The word is so common among men, that it may be thought a definition is scarcely necessary; however, as people have annexed different ideas to it, a small attention to the matter may not be impertinent. The propensity of the human mind has such a preponderancy to evil, that it is more than possible it has proved a stimulus to vice; and so our liberty become a cloak of licentiousness. That some have carried the point so far, as to break through every barrier of restraint, we have painful evidence: While others, to avoid this extreme, have fallen on *Charybdis*, and refused that liberty wherewith Christ has made them free.

It has been thought by some, that to secure the rights of conscience is a very important trait in a free government, and the essential part of it; such ideas are so vague and indefinite, as to cast but little light on the subject: men can make conscience of almost any thing to carry a point. The scriptures speak of a *feared* and *defiled* conscience. How often is this noble light in man obscured and rendered more than useless, through the prevalence of a corrupt heart, and the light in us becomes total darkness? In this way many will plead exemption from duty, and make a loud outcry against civil injunctions that would enforce their obligations thereto. When the dictates of conscience invade the rights and well-being of society, they are not to be gratified. When it becomes evident that a man is cloaking some malicious design against his neighbor or the commonwealth, under the sanctity of religion, it is quite suitable that he be impeded by the hand of the civil

magistrate. The ideas then that we ought to connect with Independence, Republicanism, Liberty, etc. will admit of a very simple definition. By attending to the end, or design of it, we have the thing itself. It is to defend and secure the natural rights of men. By this expression is meant, those privileges, whether civil or sacred, that the God of nature hath given us.--To know what this charter comprises, we are to view them in their relation to society at large: When they are congenial with this object, we ought most cheerfully to fall in with the design, and view ourselves as breathing the very spirit and life of true liberty. This is that noble independence and republicanism taught in my text. Every deviation from this test, is inconsistent with true liberty, and ought to meet with some kind of obstruction from civil authority.

That I have not erred in the above description is evident, from the magnitude of the object proposed, viz. the *general good*: therefore most salutary to men, and only worthy of divine approbation.--It is true, men may disagree as to what will conduce to the general good, and so human laws be very imperfect. That the public voice is to decide on the subject, must be granted. Yet there may be so great a defection in a kingdom or commonwealth, as to vindicate the minor in withdrawing; but so long as we remain connected with a society, I see no way but to submit, without an attack on the rights of men, and the principle of true liberty, unless where the real rights of conscience are evidently invaded.

Our beneficent creator has furnished us with moral and natural endowments, and they according to common sense, are our own: if so we have a right to use them in every way wherein we make no encroachments on the equal rights of our neighbor.--Others can have no demand on us for what they never gave or for which we are in no sense indebted to them. Every attack of this nature ought to be opposed with the same laudable zeal and abhorrence as if it had been made on our lives. As we stand related to God, it is true we are not our own, yet he allows us this prerogative to exert all our faculties, in behalf of the general good.--The laws of the commonwealth are to defend mankind in the peaceable possession of these invaluable blessings, which equally belong unto all men as their birthright.--As civil regulations respect the community, and all are equally interested in them, we at once argue their origin, viz. from the people at large. This is that genuine republicanism that we ought most earnestly to contend for, and is the very foundation of true independence; the excellency and importance of which, will in the next place be considered.

The benign influence of such a constitution and government, comprised in the above remarks, may be clearly deduced from the considerations, that it is falling in with the divine plan, and coincident with the laws of nature. These rights were given to men by the author of our being, as the best antidote against faction; to meliorate the troubles of life, and to cement mankind in the strictest bonds of friendship and society.--Those who oppose such a form of government, would invert the order of nature, and the constitution of heaven, and destroy the beauty and harmony of the natural and moral worlds.

The troubles incident to men, have their origin from this source; nor can the body politic enjoy peace, symmetry and tranquility, until it resumes its order; but like a dislocated bone, will diffuse convulsion and pain through every member. The natural body is in health and prosperity so long as its constituted laws have their free operation; but when obstructed, sickness and death are inevitable.

It may further be observed, that a free republican government has the preference to all others, in that it tends to destroy those distinctions among men that ought never to exist. "All men are born equally free and independent and have certain inherent and unalienable rights," to use the language of our own constitution, which coincides with the holy oracles, Act 17.26:

The more this can be maintained the nearer it answers the original perfect draught. If God saw such a state of society was most favorable to men, it ought still to be maintained. The distinctions only to be reprobated are such as have no true merit in them, but are merely nominal, such as birth, riches, empty titles, etc.--These were the things contended for by the disciples of Jesus, which he discards in the text; they would be great without goodness or without serving the public. Palm upon an aspiring mortal the flattering titles of King, Prince, Lord, etc. merely because he was born under a more splendid roof or lay in a softer cradle, than his neighbor, has more gold in his chest, and his farm is wider at both ends, or what thro' mistake has a higher parentage, he will at once forget the only test of true greatness, and only value himself on his being able to tyrannize over others, and can look down on his own species with contempt. This at once throws the balance of power into the wrong scale and enervates the bands of society. This has been the fruitful source of domination and bloodshed which has denominated this world as aceldama; this has kept Europe at war with little cessation for more than nine centuries; and its influence has been felt in the happy climes of

North America.--Blessed be God! the bloody flag could not be established on our shores; and while others are falling victims to the hard and cruel hand of tyranny, we enjoy peace far from the din of war, and the hideous habitations of cruel oppressors.

There cannot be a greater source of evil to mankind than to imbibe wrong sentiments about true greatness.--In a land like ours, where the people are free and view each other as brethren engaged in one common cause, virtue and philanthropy will be considered as the true criterions of distinction.--He will be esteemed great who is servant of all, who is willing to devote his talents to the public good. These are the prominent features of a free, republican government, and should attach us to our present constitution.

Again, a free, independent administration, like ours, is very friendly to knowledge and instruction; it expands the human mind, and gives it a thirst after improvement. The amazing progress that these states have made in useful arts and science, of almost every kind, during the twenty five years of our independence, will justify the present remark; perhaps no history will be read to better advantage.--When men are made to believe that true dignity consists in outward parade and pompous titles, they forget the thing itself, and the greater part of the community view the other as unattainable, they look up to others as above them, and forget to think for themselves, nor retain their own importance in the scale of being. Hence, under a monarchal government, people are commonly ignorant; they know but little more than to bow to despots, and crouch to them for a piece of bread.

The propriety of this idea will appear strikingly evident by pointing you to the poor Africans, among us. What has reduced them to their present pitiful, abject state? Is it any distinction that the God of nature hath made in their formation? Nay--but being subjected to slavery, by the cruel hands of oppressors, they have been taught to view themselves as a rank of beings far below others, which has suppressed, in a degree, every principle of manhood, and so they become despised, ignorant, and licentious. This shows the effects of despotism, and should fill us with the utmost detestation against every attack on the rights of men: while we cherish and diffuse, with a laudable ambition, that heaven-born liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. Should we compare those countries, where tyrants are gorged with human blood, to the far more peaceful regions of North America, the contrast would appear striking.

On the whole, does it not appear that a land of liberty is favorable to peace, happiness, virtue and religion, and should be held sacred by mankind?

In the last place--A few directions were promised, as necessary means to secure or maintain our liberties and independence. The fate of the once noble republic of Rome, and many others: What took place in the interregnum of eleven years and four months in England, between the reigns of Charles First and Second, may show that 'tis more than possible that such a precious diamond may lose its lustre, and undergo a total extinction. The present unhappy divisions among us, do not wear the most favourable aspects, as to this matter.

In the first place--It is quite necessary that people well understand the true *nature* of republicanism and independence; that they impart something noble and excellent; nothing vain and licentious, but what is promotive of order, virtue and morality.--The state of mankind, is such, that they cannot live without law: break down this barrier, and our case at once becomes alarming. It is nothing strange, if through the perverseness of human nature, our system has been misunderstood, as falling in with the lusts of men, and favorable to a dissolute life: than which nothing can be more subversive of the scheme. That even in regenerated France, there has been something of this nature, is too evident.--We should always keep in mind that a true republican is one who wishes well to the good constitution and laws of the commonwealth, is ready to lend his heart, his sword and his property for their support; gives merit its proper place; respects magistrates, according as they appear to regard the happiness of society, and seeks the general good.--He is peaceable and quiet under an wholesome administration; but anarchy and confusion are of all things most detestable, while he grows better under the benign influence of good government. It is very common for people to expect too much from such a system, and cannot in any degree be satisfied without a perfect administration. This is not to be expected in this degenerate world; Therefore some imperfections in those who serve the public, must be dispensed with.--This is an idea of peculiar importance in a republican government like ours, where civil officers are so directly amenable to the people. Let it be remembered, that true independence has religion, regularity and a veneration for good order for its objects.

When a minor comes of age, and is no longer under tutors and governors, it is too often the case, that he forgets all kinds of subordination, and sinks into dissipation and vice, and is at last

shut up in a bastille, or becomes a prisoner at Newgate.

2. Would a people maintain their independence, the wholesome laws of the commonwealth ought to be faithfully executed. It is generally expected that a republic breathes kindness, tenderness or benevolence. From the merciless hand of tyranny, there is a natural, and easy transition to a state of extreme moderation.--Whatever laws are enacted, they lose all their importance without a regard to their sanctions.--They must be firmly and faithfully executed, or at once they fall into contempt, the bands of society are broken down and destruction becomes inevitable.

3. The neutrality of these states ought to be held sacred; not only because it is so earnestly recommended in the legacy of him whose name is still precious to every true American, I mean the immortal WASHINGTON; but because it also comports with the plain dictates of reason.--"Leave off contention before it be meddled with," was the advice of one of the wisest princes; the infection is dangerous; by it we shall be apt to imbibe the ferocity of warriors, become inhuman, and involve ourselves in the general faction. Let us stand and behold other nations at war with emotions of pity; while to us the laurel of peace sits regent on the throne and sweetens every enjoyment. That we have hitherto been preserved from taking an active part in foreign contentions, demands a tribute of thanks to him, who has raised up instruments and blessed their judicious endeavors.--Let us be what these words import, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES.

4. As a further mean to maintain our rights and immunities, we should beware of discord among ourselves. That a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, is a divine maxim, and confirmed by long experience. Union in every society is essential to its existence.--Every thing of a petulant and party spirit ought carefully to be avoided.--Candid discussion is useful in every community; while bitterness, invective and enthusiasm, only prejudice the heart and blind the understanding. How often have public occasions, that otherwise might have proved profitable, been rendered more than useless for want of that prudence, moderation and friendship that should always distinguish a free people.--That the unhappy divisions among us, have been greatly stimulated by such means, we have painful evidence. That the press can plead exemption from such an imputation, cannot be admitted.

Foreign powers envy our tranquility, they abhor republicanism; as by it their craft is in danger. They wish in every possible way to separate us, that we may fall an easy prey to their pride and avarice. Next to maintaining our independence, let us cultivate a laudable union among ourselves and this will render us invincible to every rival.

5. Might I be indulged a little, I would say, that education and the diffusion of useful knowledge, is very favorable to a free government. Oppression and usurpation hold their empires where ignorance and darkness spread their sable domain. Let people be well instructed, let them read the history of kings, and know the rights of men, and it will be difficult to make them believe that the names, King, Lord, Sovereign, Prince, Viscount, and such childish trumpery, ought to command their purse, their property, and liberty; but that goodness, virtue or benevolence, are things that demand veneration.

6. The end and design of government, which is to secure the natural rights of men, suggests another idea of importance as necessary to support our present Constitution, viz. That such men be appointed to office whose characters comport with it.--If to preserve our lives and property, and to defend the public from every encroachment, are the great objects of civil government, then men of a philanthropic spirit, who will naturally care for mankind, ought only to occupy places of public trust. He that would wish to become consequential in any other way, only in seeking the good of his neighbor, is dangerous to society.--"But ye shall not be so;" says my text, "but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."--The end of the appointment is to serve our generation by the will of God; then men of a narrow, selfish, mercenary spirit should forever be excluded from posts of preferment. The fawning sycophant, who is seeking promotion only to gratify his pride and ambition, will if an opportunity presents, sell his country for less than thirty pieces of silver.

The sentiment now inculcating receives abundant energy from the oracles of divine truth, and should ever be held sacred.

7. In a word, it would be an unpardonable error should I forget to mention that which after all is the great and only source of felicity, peace and prosperity among men, I mean religion. A republican government has its basis in this. Can we form a more noble idea of piety and Christianity than what is comprised in the words benevolence and true patriotism. To love God and one another, and to seek the happiness and good of the universe, involves every thing that is great, noble, virtuous and excellent. Selfishness enervates every social band and endearment; sets men at variance, and

is the source of every evil. Vice debases and weakens the human mind; and is to the body politic what sickness is to the natural constitution. No sooner did Sampson trespass on the rules of religion and morality, than he became a weak, menial slave, and did grind in the prison house. Pride, dissipation and impiety have crumbled empires in the dust, and buried their names in everlasting oblivion. A sacred regard to holy institutions is necessary to secure the divine favour and protection, and to maintain the order of society. Those words of inspiration cannot too often be repeated, and are worthy to be written in indelible characters on the fleshy tables of our hearts: "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people."

But to draw towards a close,

A review of this subject may tend to inspire our breasts with the magnitude and importance of our independence, which is the design of the present appointment to commemorate.

Hail! happy era! that broke the galling yoke, and taught the free born sons of Columbia to assert their birth-rights. This auspicious day, never, never to be forgotten, will be held in the highest veneration to generations yet unborn. This is the day that fair liberty purified the once contaminated regions of North America, and illuminated our country with its exhilarating beams!-- This is the day, fatal to tyrants; its influence will extend to the remotest corners of the globe, and tell the groaning sons of despots that they may be free.--This is the day that will form a surprising and important epoch in the annals of history, and be viewed with pleasing astonishment to remotest ages. It cannot be expected that the rising generation can form a competent estimate of that legacy, transmitted to them by noble ancestors: they were not on the stage when calamity, war and death spread desolation through our bleeding country; yet they will find such vestiges of zeal for liberty, and for the contested rights of their country, as will be more glorious and significant than the pyramids of Egypt.--We trust they will never forget to hold these things sacred, and convey them inviolate to posterity.--May America ever retain her dignity, and grow in esteem on the true basis of merit; --be a scourge to tyrants, a retreat for the oppressed.--May her civil, military, and religious operations, ever conspire to promote peace, piety and prosperity, and introduce those happy days, when the danger of war shall be too remote to disturb our repose, or wound the tender feelings of the soul. Nothing can be more detrimental to religion than tyranny and oppression, or to that kingdom the blessed Jesus came into the world to set up, which gave rise to the caution in the text, "But ye shall not be so: but he that is great among you shall be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." May we not almost predict that this will be the blissful region that will introduce the golden age, or peaceful kingdom, that shall break in pieces all the haughty empires of the world and so America become the glory of the whole earth. The prospect grows upon our imagination and fills the soul with anticipating joy! --Oppression, tyranny and domination are the mystical Euphrates, that must be dried up that the beams of this rising morning may illuminate our globe. The veteran sons of Vermont, should not be the last to espouse the rights of men as her zeal shone conspicuous at an early period. The present flourishing situation of this state, its population, and commerce, are truly surprising; should she be as distinguished for her peace, virtue and morality, she will soon become a star of no small magnitude in the revolution. These sentiments are not suggested to stimulate pride and vain ambition, but to that noble spirit adverted to in my text, which is the highest ornament of human nature on earth, and renders us fit subjects for the entertainments of heaven.

Our independence was purchased at a dear rate: more than an hundred thousand fell in the important struggle.--The sweet, the delicious draught, that this day cheers our spirits, is the price of blood. The disconsolate widow, the bereaved parent, and the weeping orphan, can still relate the mournful disaster. To buy our freedom; the generous warrior has forsaken the inviting charms of domestic life, has distinguished himself in the field of battle, and become a victim to the king of terrors. Many of our once ruddy youth have fallen in the inhospitable desert, and been a prey to savage barbarity. How many have breathed out their souls beneath some lofty oak, or more humble shrub, without a friend to witness the agonizing groan, or soothe the convulsions of nature! The tributary tear should trickle down our cheek, while the detail of woe accosts our imagination!--The situation of our country before independence was proclaimed, was such that nothing but a preference of liberty to life itself, could give rise to the declaration. We were comparatively small;--Our troops undisciplined, and unaccustomed to the hardships of war; our military stores scarcely sufficient for a single combat; a formidable enemy to oppose, whose arms had commonly proved victorious; we had also intestine foes, who were ready to betray us, etc. May we not say with the utmost propriety, "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us:--then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us"--Those advocates

for liberty, whose names are this day precious, and thro' whose instrumentality our independence is established, derived all their skill, prowess and zeal from that almighty being, who directs all the affairs of men. Nothing short of a kind of miraculous interposition has brought us hitherto.--With the warmest emotions of heart, let us erect an altar of praise to him who is the author of our independence, and to whom we are still to look for its support.

Let us never forget the remarkable divine goodness towards us in the times of distress. Many of you can remember those days of tribulation, being driven from your habitations, and were disturbed with the frightful haunts of blood-thirsty savages, through the silent watches of the night! Our lives, our all hung in suspense; but the Lord, who is the scourge of tyrants, the friend of liberty, hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Let us raise up tribute of thanks to our great benefactor, and offer the most unfeigned gratitude on the altar of praise. May that exalted name, the Lord Jehovah, animate our souls, to whose paternal benignity we owe our present dignity, that we may never be blind to his holy government, thro' the glare of prosperity. On occasions like this, we are too apt to forget this object, and tarnish our laurels by immoderate indulgence. To cultivate peace, friendship and freedom, is falling in with the nature of the appointment. Would we maintain our independence, let us secure the patronage of him from whence it derived its existence and who has distinguished America by most signal displays of goodness and power. To be impatient under a constitution like ours, and not be ready to use every laudable endeavour on all proper occasions to defend it, argue an unpardonable supineness. Explore every corner of the globe for an equal asylum, tired in the fruitless chase, you would most eagerly seek the refreshing shades of happy Columbia. Still it is a land of improvement; we are not to conclude that the fair tree of liberty hath reached its highest zenith; may we not add to its lustre by every new and valuable acquisition: But we should keep in mind the principles and end of government; That it is to curb the passions of men; to suppress vice and immorality; to build up society, and to establish religion in the world. What encouragement in such a land as this, for men to seek for greatness on the true basis of merit, or to rise in the scale of being by serving their country, or by devoting their talents to the general good? On the other hand, those who would climb up any other way, will be accounted thieves and robbers. To shun the shoals of despotism on the one hand, and the rocks of anarchy on the other, requires skill, prudence and moderation. A candid, careful and impartial vigilance, under the auspices of heaven, will be our sure and constant protection.

Should the Fourth of July, be ever promotive of peace, friendship and religion, the word INDEPENDENCE will have a commanding influence, and be more durable than pillars of marble.

FINIS
